



TALKING TRANSPORTATION

Bikes on Trains?

Much has been written in recent weeks about allowing bicyclists to bring their vehicles on board Metro North commuter trains, and I wanted to add my two cents just as a commuter and not as Chairman of the Commuter Council. (Never be confused when I write here as I am always and only speaking for myself and not the many groups on which I serve.)

What is it about “bikers” that they feel their rights trump those of other commuters? How can such a well organized and vocal lobby be so blind to the sad realities of commuting on Metro-North that they would ask commuters to straddle their two-wheelers in standee-filled vestibules in the name of personal liberties and “being green”?

Bikers have no more “right” to bring bicycles on crowded rush-hour trains than I have to haul aboard a steamer trunk. (At least you could sit on a steamer trunk). Yet, they rant against everyone in their personal strivings for two-wheeled freedom.

In the interest of personal disclosure: I do not ride a bike, but I do commute and often must stand for an hour or more due to lack of seats.

Bikers... here are the facts of life:

Fact #1: There's no room for bikes at rush hours. Heck, we don't have enough seats for paying passengers, let alone space for bicycles. And the new M8 cars that are coming won't change that crowding for many, many years given annual ridership increases averaging 5%.

Fact #2: Bikes are already allowed on non-rush hour trains. And they're carried for free. So quit your whining.

Fact #3: If you're heading for New York City, you don't need a bike. Mass transit is plentiful in the city, so leave your Cannondale in Cannondale.

Fact #4 (or maybe an opinion): I don't think there's any demand for bikes among city-bound commuters.

The pro-bike lobby is well organized, very vocal and relentless. But they're also unreasonable in their demands that every Metro-North train accommodate a special car filled with bike racks.

They point to such services in the San Francisco bay area, but Caltrain has only 37,000 daily riders carried on 100 double-decker passenger cars compared to Metro-North's Connecticut ridership of 110,000 each day crammed into cars with much less space. If Caltrain's ridership continues to climb, I predict they'll rip out the bike racks and add seats.

If bikers really wanted to build support for their cause, I have a suggestion. Rather than rant against those who reasonably argue against bikes on trains, the bikers should instead lobby for bike racks and lockers at rail stations. Attract more people to two-wheeled transportation to catch the train by persuading local towns which operate those stations that this would be a great way to cut parking permit waiting lists. Towns like Westport do a great job with bike racks. Why can't the other towns use parking revenue to similarly serve their residents?

The bottom line: until every paying passenger gets a seat for their Metro-North ticket, let's allocate room on the trains to people, not their bikes.



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